

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRASILIA 5081

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, BR
SUBJECT: FIGUEIREDO'S HONESTY QUESTIONED

SUMMARY: PRESIDENT CANDIDATE FIGUEIREDO'S RESPONSE TO
A STUDENT'S QUESTION CONCERNING HIS PERSONAL HONESTY HAS
PROMPTED A FORMAL COMPLAINT AGAINST HIM BY GENERAL HUGO
ABREU AND IS LIKELY TO REINFORCE STRAINS OVER HIS CANDIDACY
AMONG MILITARY ELEMENTS. END SUMMARY.

1. IN EXPERIMENTAL OPENING OF HIS "CAMPAIGN" FOR THE PRESIDENCY,
RETIRED GENERAL JOAO BAPTISTA FIGUEIREDO HAS SPENT THE LAST
FEW DAYS IN HIS HOME TOWN (RIO DE JANEIRO) VISITING HIS BIRTHPLACE
AND OLD HAUNTS, SUBMITTING TO PRESS AND OTHER INTERVIEWS,
AND ON ONE OCCASION SHOWING HIS NOTORIOUS TEMPER. THE LATTER
HAS ALREADY CAUSED REPERCUSSIONS.

2. ON JUNE 26, FIGUEIREDO MET WITH A GROUP OF STUDENTS
FROM DIFFERENT RIO UNIVERSITIES, REPORTEDLY THE FIRST TIME
A PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE HAD HELD SUCH A MEETING SINCE THE 1974
REVOLUTION. HE RESPONDED FREELY TO QUESTIONS ON ASSORTED
SUBJECTS, INCLUDING AN OBVIOUSLY UNEXPECTED ONE INVOLVING HIS
PERSONAL HONESTY. ONE STUDENT STATED THAT "ONE FINE DAY, YOU
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WERE HELP UP TO US AS OUR NEXT PRESIDENT. BUT WE DON'T KNOW
ANYTHING ABOUT YOU, AND THERE IS AN ACCUSATION AGAINST
YOU THAT HAS NOT YET BEEN DENIED. WHY HAVEN'T YOU RESPONDED
TO GENERAL HUGO ABREU'S CHARGE THAT YOU ARE SUPPORTED BY
CORRUPT GROUPS? THE QUESTION REMAINS OPEN, GENERAL, AND
SILENCE MEANS CONSENT."

3. THE QUESTION AND FIGUEIREDO'S RESPONSE WERE SHOWN IN THEIR ENTIRETY ON TELEVISION. FIGUEIREDO LOOKED AS IF HE WAS ABOUT TO EXPLODE. HIS QUESTIONER LOOKED AS IF HE WAS ABOUT TO DIVE UNDER THE TABLE. ALTHOUGH HALF-RISING FROM HIS CHAIR, FIGUEIREDO CONTROLLED HIMSELF ENOUGH TO RESPOND LOUDLY AND FIRMLY THAT ABREU HAD NOT ACCUSED HIM OF THIS PERSONALLY, THAT IF HE TRIED HE WOULD NOT "EVEN GET HALF-WAY", AND THAT IN ANY EVENT ABREU NEVER WOULD TIE HIM TO A GROUP THAT WAS CORRUPT OR IN ANY OTHER WAY AGAINST THE INTERESTS OF BRAZIL. HE SAID HE KNEW THAT SUCH INFAMOUS INSINUATIONS HAD APPEARED IN THE PRESS, AND THAT UNFORTUNATELY PEOPLE BELIEVE THEM, BUT THAT HE IS NOT CORRUPT, HIS LIFE IS AN OPEN BOOK, HE HAS NO WEALTH, AND HE DOES NOT BELIEVE ABREU EVER SAID SUCH A THING. AFTER SETTLING DOWN, HE CONTINUED ANSWERING UNRELATED QUESTIONS FOR A FEW MORE MINUTES.

4. ABREU RESPONDED JUNE 27 WITH A FORMAL COMPLAINT TO ARMY MINISTER BETHLEM THROUGH HIS IMMEDIATE SUPERIOR, ARMY PERSONNEL CHIEF GENERAL SERPA, REQUESTING THAT "APPROPRIATE MEASURES BE TAKEN", AND ISSUED A STATEMENT TO THE PRESS. ABREU RECALLED THAT ON JANUARY 2 HE HAD EXPRESSED TO PRESIDENT GEISEL HIS OBJECTIONS TO THE MANNER IN WHICH GEISEL HAD SELECTED FIGUEIREDO TO SUCCEED HIM, THAT HE HAD THEREFORE RESIGNED AS GEISEL'S MILITARY HOUSEHOLD CHIEF, AND THAT HE HAD SINCE REMAINED SILENT ON THE POLITICAL SITUATION. ABREU SAID HE WAS THUS TAKEN BY SURPRISE BY FIGUEIREDO'S "SLANDEROUS VERBAL CONFIDENTIAL

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AGGRESSION", WHICH HE FOUND "HIGHLY SCHOCKING". HE SAID HE WAS NOT ABOUT TO TRADE INSULTS PUBLICLY WITH ANOTHER GENERAL AND THUS DENIGRATE THE ARMY'S IMAGE AND JEOPARDIZE ARMY UNIT. HE WOULD, THEREFORE, NOT COMMENT AGAIN ON THE MATTER, WHICH HE HAD SUBMITTED TO MILITARY AUTHORITIES FOR THEIR CONSIDERATION. IN RESPONSE TO A SUBSEQUENT PRESS QUESTION AS TO THE TRUTH OF THE INSINUATIONS AGAINST FIGUEIREDO, ABREU REPORTEDLY RESPONDED THAT HE WOULD NEITHER CONFIRM NOR DENY THEM, ADDING THAT FIGUEIREDO KNOWS WHETHER THEY ARE TRUE OR NOT, AND THAT HE DOES NOT WISH TO "POLEMICIZE" THE MATTER.

5. COMMENT: IN THE DAYS FOLLOWING ABREU'S RESIGNATION, RUMORS CIRCULATED TO THE EFFECT THAT HE HAD WRITTEN A LETTER TO GEISEL SETTING OUT HIS POSITION AND ACCUSING VARIOUS HIGHLY-PLACED FIGUEIREDO SUPPORTERS (INCLUDING CIVIL HOUSEHOLD CHIEF GOLBERL AND FIGUEIREDO'S TWO SONS OF BEING IN THE PAID SERVICE OF FOREIGN COMMERCIAL GROUPS OR INTERESTS. SUCH A LETTER HAS NEVER BEEN OFFICIALLY CONFIRMED, BUT IT IS WIDELY BELIEVED TO EXIST.

6. ABREU MAY HAVE BEEN SILENT SINCE JANUARY BUT HE HAS

HARDLY BEEN POLITICALLY INACTIVE. AS PRINCIPAL ARTICULATOR OF A POTENTIAL EULER BENTES CANDIDACY AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO FIGUEIREDO, HE HAS BEEN A MAJOR CONTRIBUTOR TO THE FORMATION OF THE STILL NASCENT AND AMORPHOUS FRONT FOR REDEMOCRATIZATION (WHICH THE MDB VOTED TO SUPPORT LAST WEEK, AT LEAST ON PAPER--MDB ACTIVITIES BEING REPORTED SEPTEL). WHILE ABREU'S COMPLAINT AGAINST FIGUEIREDO WILL MOST PROBABLY GET NOWHERE (THE QUESTION OF DISCIPLINARY ACTION AGAINST HIM WOULD ULTIMATELY REST WITH GEISEL, THE FACT THAT THE ISSUE HAS BEEN JOINED WILL PROVIDE FURTHER AMMUNITION TO THOSE WITHIN THE MILITARY WHO, FOR WHATEVER REASON, QUESTION THE ACCEPTABILITY OF FIGUEIREDO'S CANDIDACY. CONCERN AMONG ELEMENTS OF THE MILITARY OVER THE CESSION OF BRAZILIAN PATRIMONY TO FOREIGN INTERESTS
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HAS BEEN A CONSTANT IN BRAZILIAN POLITICS SINCE AT LEAST THE SECOND VARGAS PERIOD IN THE EARLY 1950'S.

7. FURTHER, THE HIGHLIGHTING OF WHAT HAD BEEN A DORMANT ISSUE AGAIN RAISES THE QUESTION (FOR GEISEL) OF WHAT TO DO ABOUT ABREU--THE LAST ACTION AGAINST HIM WAS THE REMOVAL OF TWO OF HIS KEY AIDES (BRASILIA 4239).

8. AS TO FIGUEIREDO'S CAMPAIGN TECHNIQUE, ARENA SECRETARY GENERAL NELSON MARCHEZAN TOLD POLITICAL COUNSELOR JUNE 27 THAT THE LESSONS OF THE RIO EXPOSURE WOULD BE CAREFULLY STUDIED BEFORE THE CANDIDATE VENTURES FORTH AGAIN. FIGUEIREDO'S NEXT EVENT IS THE JUNE 29 INAUGURATION OF HIS CAMPAIGN HEADQUARTERS IN BRASILIA'S ARACOARA HOTEL.
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